

September 19, 2018

For Immediate Release

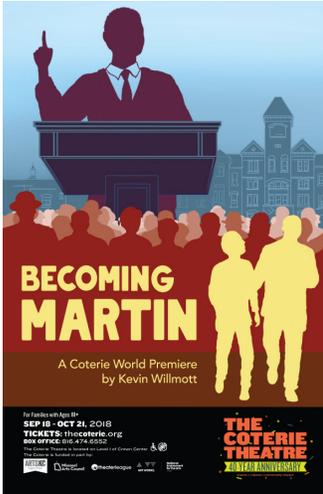
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**The Coterie Opens 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Season  
with NEA Award-Winning  
World Premiere about Mentorship  
of Martin Luther King, Jr.,  
written by Noted Local Writer/Filmmaker**

***Becoming Martin***  
by Kevin Willmott

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**OVERVIEW:**

WHAT: ***Becoming Martin***  
by Kevin Willmott  
Directed by Chip Miller

WHEN: **September 18 – October 21, 2018**  
**Press / Opening Night: Friday, September 21, at 7:00 p.m.**

WHERE: The Coterie, Level one of Crown Center, 2450 Grand Blvd., Kansas City, MO

PRICE: \$12.00 for youth under 18, full-time students, and seniors age 60 and older;  
\$15.00 for adults

INFO / RESERVATIONS: The Coterie Box Office  
Phone: (816) 474-6552 Online: [www.thecoterie.org](http://www.thecoterie.org)

**Kansas City, MO** – Kansas City's Coterie Theatre, nationally-recognized as one of the nation's leading creators of new works of theatre for families and young audiences, announces its 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary season will begin with the world premiere production of ***Becoming Martin***. The Coterie commissioned the creation of the play from noted filmmaker, screenwriter, director, and playwright, Kevin Willmott, who currently serves as a professor of film studies at Kansas University and whose feature film, *BlackKkKlansman*, which he co-wrote with Spike Lee, won the Grand Prix at

the 2018 Cannes Film Festival and opened at #5 nationwide last month. Written for families with ages 11 and older and announced in May 2018 as a National Endowment for the Arts award-winning project, ***Becoming Martin*** shows the early life and college years of Martin Luther King, Jr., who received early admission at age 15 to Morehouse College, where he was mentored by Dr. Benjamin Mays. The Coterie will produce ***Becoming Martin*** in community partnership with Big Brothers Big Sisters Kansas City and The Black Archives of Mid-America in Kansas City. Directed by Chip Miller, ***Becoming Martin*** will open The Coterie's 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Season with its premiere run, September 18-October 21, 2018.

## THE PLAY

***Becoming Martin*** offers young audiences a completely unique chance to see the early life and development of the leader Martin Luther King, Jr., would later become. Set in September 1944, the play shows a 15-year-old King as he steps onto campus at Morehouse College, one of the nation's most prestigious historically Black colleges for men. Growing up in segregated Atlanta, King had experienced first-hand the pain of racism and Jim Crow laws. He knew he wanted to serve his people and dismantle systematic racism — but didn't yet know how. To fight back, he considered becoming a doctor or lawyer. However, Morehouse College president, Dr. Mays, took Martin under his wing, and through debate over civil disobedience concepts, set him on a path toward fighting for civil rights through ministry. ***Becoming Martin*** takes Martin Luther King, Jr., out of grainy, historical recordings of ground-breaking speeches and transforms him into the kid his friends called "Tweed" — a regular teen who likes girls, gets average grades, deals with a domineering parent, and grows to respect a teacher who will help him lay the foundation for the leader he will one day become.

## THE PLAYWRIGHT

***Becoming Martin*** reunites The Coterie with Kevin Willmott, who is a Kansas native and longtime collaborator of Coterie's producing artistic director, Jeff Church. Willmott previously directed of The Coterie's productions of *Buffalo Hair* (1998), *Little Tommy Parker and the Celebrated Colored Minstrel Show* (1999), *The Glass Menagerie* (2001), as well as wrote and directed The Coterie's adaptation of *The Watsons Go to Birmingham* (2005). Willmott is an award-winning screenwriter, filmmaker, playwright, actor, professor and activist who received his BA in Drama from Marymount College. After college, he returned home to Kansas, working as a peace and civil rights activist, fighting for the rights of the poor, creating two homeless shelters and forcing the integration of segregated institutions. He earned his MFA in Dramatic Writing from Tisch School of the Arts, and is currently Professor of Film Studies at Kansas University. Willmott is hailed as one of the most prolific independent filmmakers today, having written and directed the feature films *Ninth Street* (1999); *C.S.A.: Confederate States of America* (2004), which premiered at the Sundance Film Festival before theatrical distribution; and *Destination: Planet Negro* (2013); and written, directed and produced the films *Bunker Hill* (2008); *The Only Good Indian* (2008); and *Jayhawkers* (2013).

His most recent projects include co-writing the films, *Chi-Raq* (2015), and the 2018 Cannes Grand Prix prize winner, *BlackKkKlansman*, with filmmaker, Spike Lee.

## THE ARTISTS

The cast of *Becoming Martin* will feature Walter Coppage (as Dr. Benjamin E. Mays), Sherri Roulette Mosley (as Sadie Mays), Aaron Ellis (as Martin Luther King, Jr.), Granville O'Neal (as Martin Luther King, Sr.), and George L. Forbes (as Prof. George D. Kelsey). The artistic and production company includes Jeff Church (Producing Artistic Director), Chip Miller (director), Danielle Renee (production stage manager), Scott Hobart (technical director), Jordan Janota (set designer), Jarrett Bertocin (lighting designer), Georgianna Londré Buchanan (costume designer), David Kiehl (sound designer), Joyce Merrill (properties/set dressing), Scott Stackhouse (Dialect Coach), and Amanda Arany (production assistant).

## WORLD PREMIERES & SOCIAL JUSTICE AT THE COTERIE

*Becoming Martin* continues The Coterie's long-standing tradition of creating and premiering new works of theatre for young people and families, having commissioned and/or produced the premieres of over 100 plays in its 40-year history, many of which have gone on to be produced at multiple theatres around the country. *Becoming Martin* also continues The Coterie's history of producing social justice plays, including the recent critically-acclaimed productions *We Shall Not Be Moved: The Student Sit-ins of 1960*, *The Nine Who Dared: Courage in Little Rock*, *The Freedom Trial of Anthony Burns 1858*, and *Rosa Park and the Montgomery Bus Boycott*. In conjunction with *Becoming Martin*, The Coterie will once again offer educators pre-show, in-school workshops that will introduce students to the events in the play and help put the story into historical context. Over the past three years, The Coterie's pre-show, in-school workshops have served over 10,000 area students in more than 500 workshops at nearly 150 schools.

## PRODUCED IN COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

The Coterie will produce *Becoming Martin* in community partnership with **Big Brothers Big Sisters Kansas City (BBBSKC)**, which creates and supports life-changing friendships between children facing adversity in the Kansas City area with caring, adult mentors. BBBSKC believes that children who have a positive influence in their lives are better able to reach their full potential. BBBSKC has over 1,400 active Matches in the Kansas City area but there are still over 400 children and teens who are waiting for a Big Brother, Big Sister, or Big Couple. Being a Big is simply being a friend to a child who wants and needs a mentor in their life. For more information on our program, visit [www.bbbskc.org](http://www.bbbskc.org).

The Coterie will also partner with the **Black Archives of Mid-America in Kansas City**, which collects, preserves and makes available to the public materials documenting the social, economic,

political, and cultural histories of persons of African American descent in the central United States, with particular emphasis in the Kansas City. The Black Archives is an educational resource and provides access to its collections for research, exhibition, and publication in order to honor the African American community heritage and catalyze public awareness. For more information, visit [www.blackarchives.org](http://www.blackarchives.org).

## TICKET INFORMATION

Tickets, Spotlight Passes, and Group Reservations for The Coterie's 2018/2019 mainstage season are on sale now through The Coterie's box office at **816.474.6552** or [www.thecoterie.org](http://www.thecoterie.org).

- **Subscriptions:** In lieu of season subscriptions, The Coterie offers passes which work like season tickets without committing to a set schedule. Passes range from \$110.00-\$150.00 and include a variety of benefits including 10 flexible tickets that can be used on a combination of shows in the 2018/2019 Season, priority seating, ticket exchanges, and other privileges.
- **Individual Tickets:** Tickets for *Becoming Martin* are \$12.00 for youth under 18, students, and seniors age 60 and older, and \$15.00 for adults.
- **Group Pricing:** The Coterie offers groups of 20 or more a special preview rate of \$5.00 per person the first week of each production. After preview week, groups for *Becoming Martin* pay only \$5.50 - \$8.00 per person depending on performance date.

## PERFORMANCE CALENDAR

### BECOMING MARTIN

| SEPTEMBER 18 - OCTOBER 21, 2018 |    |                           |                           |                           |                                   |            |
|---------------------------------|----|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------|
| S                               | M  | T                         | W                         | T                         | F                                 | S          |
|                                 |    | 18<br>9:45 am             | 19<br>9:45 am             | 20<br>9:45 am<br>11:45 am | 21<br>9:45 am<br>11:45 am<br>7 pm | 22<br>2 pm |
| 23<br>2 pm                      | 24 | 25<br>9:45 am<br>11:45 am | 26<br>9:45 am<br>11:45 am | 27<br>9:45 am<br>11:45 am | 28<br>9:45 am<br>11:45 am<br>7 pm | 29<br>2 pm |
| 30<br>2 pm                      | 1  | 2<br>9:45 am<br>11:45 am  | 3<br>9:45 am<br>11:45 am  | 4<br>9:45 am<br>11:45 am  | 5<br>9:45 am<br>11:45 am<br>7 pm  | 6<br>2 pm  |
| 7<br>2 pm                       | 8  | 9<br>9:45 am<br>11:45 am  | 10<br>9:45 am<br>11:45 am | 11<br>9:45 am<br>11:45 am | 12<br>9:45 am<br>11:45 am<br>7 pm | 13<br>2 pm |
| 14<br>2 pm                      | 15 | 16<br>9:45 am<br>11:45 am | 17<br>9:45 am<br>11:45 am | 18<br>9:45 am<br>11:45 am | 19<br>9:45 am<br>11:45 am<br>7 pm | 20<br>2 pm |
| 21<br>2 pm                      |    |                           |                           |                           |                                   |            |

#### CALENDAR LEGEND



Opening Night



Post-performance **Question and Answer session** with the company



**Interpreted performance** in American Sign Language

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Due to the nature of live theatre, play selection, performance schedule and casting are subject to change.

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